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The Fable of the Timorous Lawyer and the Omnicompetent Secretary

BY RICHARD C. HEATON*

Once upon a time there was a Timorous Lawyer who was Deathly Afraid of Women. He was, of course, a Confirmed Bachelor and, by reason thereof, was Envied by each of his Friends whose life was Dominated by a Dame. But even his Intimates didn't know the Facts.

The only Female in the world with whom our Hero had more than a Nodding Acquaintance was his Secretary, who had Been With Him for a Long Time.

His First Job after he graduated from Law School was an Employment as the Very Youngest, in Years and Experience, of the Apprentices in a Large Law Factory. The Superintendent of the Plant had then Thrust Upon Him the Very Youngest, in Years and Experience, of the Stenographic Assistance in the Pool, to wit, Our Heroine.

In Due Course of Time the Timorous Lawyer overcame his Distress in the Presence of the Fair Stranger to the point where he could dictate to her without stammering and Once, when he suspected her of Giving Him the Eye, he went so far as to Consider * * * But he knew better than to Encourage That Sort of Thing in the Office, and promptly Dismissed the Notion.

Years Passed. The Timorous Lawyer became a Professional Figure in his own Right and his Secretary, who had Stuck With Him, considered herself Largely Responsible for his rise to Fame and Fortune. She Made it Plain to him from the moment he opened his own office that she was capable of Taking Complete Charge. She Did, too.

She began by Relieving him of Annoying Little Details, progressed through a period of Taking Over His Routine Work and at length Reached the Point where, as she put it, "Mr. Timorous simply couldn't get along without me."

Privately, Mr. Timorous doubted this and had come to Long Desperately for an opportunity to Put the Matter to the Test. Whenever he so much as suggested to his Secretary that she try a month's vacation, however, she would respond with either a kittenish, "How could you get along without your Office Manager?" or a tearful, "I suppose you don't really need me any more." Whatever the response, Timorous knew he was Licked, and always Let the Matter Drop.

And so there Came a Day when the Omnicompetent Secretary was not only Manager of the Office but Manager of the Boss as well. She had long since established her Authority over all the other Hired Hands by the Simple Expedient of Advertising Herself as the Boss's Alter Ego. She

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generally Got Her Way with either the junior lawyers or the younger stenographers in the Office when she prefaced her remarks with, "You know that Mr. Timorous wants * * *" or "Mr. Timorous suggests that you * * *" *et cetera*. The Help surmised that less than One Per Centum of her demands originated with Mr. Timorous, but no one quite Dared to Call her Bluff.

She ruled her Domain with an Iron Hand. She strictly forbade Personal Telephone Calls, both incoming and outgoing, even in matters of Life or Death, and listened in on nearly all the conversations over the office lines, just To Be Sure. She staggered the girls' Lunch Hours simply because they enjoyed Eating Together, although some said she did it so that they couldn't Get Together and Talk about Her. She would Go Out to the Bank for a Minute—"For Mr. Timorous"—and stay all afternoon, returning just before Quitting Time to make a great Pretense of Work and to Arrange Things so that half the Force would have to Stay Late. She would Gossip with anyone she could Buttonhole—especially if he were Pressed for Time—and when the Boss Caught Them At It, would Manage to Make it Appear entirely the fault of the Innocent Participant. She Prohibited the Locking of Desks, and Went Through Them without Conscience or Remorse. She kept at a Minimum all Personal Contact between Mr. Timorous and the Employees and became Greatly Disturbed if any of them had more than a fleeting Private Conversation with the Chief. She Quibbled about every item on the Expense Account until the Young Attorneys felt that they Simply Couldn't Afford out-of-town assignments. She was a Stern Arbiter of the Office Morals and was Quick to Detect Romance, Frivolity, Vice or Sin on the part of any Member of the Staff, whether enjoyed within or without the Premises under her Control.

Most of these things Escaped the Attention of Mr. Timorous but she Made Her Presence Known to him in other ways. She kept the books and, using alternately the powerful weapons of scorn and tears, disbursed his funds as She Thought Best. She narrowed the circle of his Friends by turning from the Door or Putting off on the Phone those of whom she Did Not Approve. She "took the liberty" of Correcting his English in documents which said just what he wanted them to say. She even chose his clothes; when he showed up in something she didn't like, she would Eye him with Disapproval and sometimes go so far as to sniff at him—"Hmf!"—like that. She made him Wear his Rubbers.

One Day it Dawned on the Timorous Lawyer that he couldn't possibly be more Henpecked if the Omnicompetent Secretary were his Wife.

So he married her.

MORAL: "The husband is the head of the family * * *"—California Civil Code, Section 156.

Charter Member of State Bar Dies

Jesse G. Northcutt, one of the charter members of the Colorado Bar Association, died after a short illness at Trinidad on April 10.

Born in Christian County, Illinois, on January 5, 1862, he spent his boyhood in the middle west, attending college at Eureka, Illinois. After his graduation, he taught school for a short time, and then migrated to Dodge City, Kansas, where he was admitted to the bar. In 1889 he moved to Trinidad, where he became active in the Republican party. He was elected judge of the district court for the third judicial district and served on the bench from 1894 to 1905.

During the World War, he organized the Second Colorado Infantry Regiment and served as its colonel. At the conclusion of the war, he entered the practice of law in Denver and maintained an office there until he retired about ten years ago. He was a Mason, Knight Templar, and a member of El Jebel Shrine. He is survived by four sons, three daughters, a brother and a sister.

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